FERTILITY CONTROL WITH UNANI MEDICINES: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Birth control, also known as contraception and fertility control, is methods or devices used to prevent pregnancy. Planning, provision and use of birth control is called planning. Previously contraceptives preparations were used mostly in the form of pessaries, suppositories, liniments and anointment. In present era there is cafeteria choice of contraceptive methods from which an individual can choose according to his needs and wishes. Main problem with these contraceptives is the adverse effect associated with long term use. Hence there is a need to search for alternate formulations from indigenous system of medicine, which can be used as contraceptives. Thus in this article it has been tried to throw a light on contraceptive drugs mentioned in Unani medicine.

Key words: Unani Medicine; Contraceptive; Mana-Hamal

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the most populous countries of the world. According to UN projection India’s population will reach 1.53 billion by the year 2050 and will be the highest population in the world. One of the causes of higher fertility in India is limited use of contraceptives. Contraceptives methods are by definition preventive methods to help women avoid unwanted pregnancies. Prevention of child birth through artificial methods is not a new thing.

In by gone days people used to prevent childbirth secretly through uncouth practices. The modern society has accorded respect to these means has improved upon them and give them a philanthropic flavour. Contraception through continence is very difficult to achieve and if there is no alternative to continence the health of numerous women will be spoiled by frequent pregnancies. Apart from this if there is no bar against childbirth , then population will grow by leaps and bounds, many families will become poorer and teir children remains half-clad, half fed and ill educated. The techniques of birth control can be classified by the stage of reproduction during which it is active. A form of birth control which prevents the sperm from fertilizing the egg is a contraceptive agent. [¹, ²] A form of birth control which acts after fertilization to prevent or interrupt the...
implantation of the embryo into the uterine lining is a contraceptive agent. [3] After implantation has occurred, an agent which ends gestation by terminating the pregnancy is an abortifacient. [1, 4]

In present era there is cafeteria choice of contraceptive methods from which an individual can choose according to his needs and wishes. Each contraceptive method has its unique advantages and disadvantages. Success of any contraceptive method depends not only on its effectiveness in preventing pregnancy but on rate of continuation of its proper use. Main problem with these contraceptives is the adverse effect associated with long term use such as liver disorders, cardiovascular effects and carcinogenesis [5] so there is a need of time to search for a safe, effective, acceptable, inexpensive, reversible and simple to administer contraceptive drugs. As Unani literature is very rich in formulations and single drugs for temporary and permanent contraceptive purpose. Thus the contraceptive drugs in Unani literature can be a alternative choice for people.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Evidence of early contraceptive techniques can be found in ancient works from a number of different cultures and societies including the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Chinese and Indians. Old references for contraception was discovered on ancient Egyptian papyrus named Kahun Papyrus which was written in 1850 BC. It describes a pessary of crocodile dung and fermented dough. The Kahun Papyrus also refers to vaginal plugs of honey, gum and ground acacia. [6] Hippocrates (460-377 BC) in his treatise “On the Nature of Women” described ‘coitus interruptus’ and ‘using fingers to wipe out the vagina’ for contraception. He had also mentioned the use of ‘Wild Carrot’ as an oral contraceptive. [7] The Greek philosopher, Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his book “Historia Animalium” was the first to mentioned contraception. He mentioned local use of olive oil, cedar oil, and ointment of lead and frankincense oil as spermicidal. [8] Galen (130-200 AD), in his book “Kitab al Advia al Mufrida” had described several medicines which have bearing on procreation. [9] During the flowering of Arabic medicine in 10th century, a variety of contraceptive recommendations were detailed, particularly in the work of Razi, Ali Ibn Abbas Majusi, Ibne Sina and Ismail Jurjani. Zakaria Razi (865-925 AD), in his book “Kitab Al Hawi Fit Tib” had revived the writings of Buqrat, Duscaridoos, Rofas, Ibn Serabuen, Ibn Masoya, Al Kandi and Hunnain Bin Ishaq regarding contraception. [10] Ali ibn Abbas Majusi (930-994 AD), in his book “Kamil-us-Sanaa” mentioned about certain conditions in which a physician should and should not prescribed any contraceptive drugs. He had also mentioned several contraceptive drugs which can be given in the form of pessaries and liniments. [11]

The great philosopher, thinker and prominent physician of Arab Medicine, Ibn Sina (980-1037 AD), in his book “Al Qanoon
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Fit Tib” had extensively described certain conditions, various practices and drugs for contraception used in the form of pessaries, suppositories, liniments, anointment, pastes and orals. In 12th century, Ismail Jurjani (1110 AD), author of excellent medical compendium entitled “Zakhira Khawarzam Shahi” had given detail description about contraceptive methods. Apart from this he had described, one of the safest and easy way to wrap the penis with a fine and thin piece of cloth, then insert and ejaculate in vagina, after the sexual act the piece of cloth should be removed, which is the origin of modern day condom. The famous Herbalist, Ibne Baitar (1197-1248 AD) had described nearly 150 drugs for contraception in his book “Al Jami li Mufridatul Advia wal Aghzia”. Nineteenth century’s famous physician Mohd. Azam Khan in his books “Akseer-e-Azam”, “Ramoz-e-Azam” and “Muheet-e-azami” had given detailed list of contraceptive drugs.

Techniques for preventing the entrance of semen in the uterus

- The man should separate from the woman at the time of ejaculation so that semen is discharged outside the uterus (coitus interruptus).
- Seminal discharge should be held-back before the separation. This is only possible by practice.
- The woman should insert some tablets or suppositories of drugs in the vagina to prevent the entrance of semen in uterus, so that the opening of uterus is closed thereby and the seminal fluid prevented from entry into uterus.

Techniques to be adopted if the semen has entered the uterus

- They should retire quickly after the sexual union and the woman should sneeze, make loud voice and repeatedly on back side.
- The woman should sit on her tiptoes and rub her umbilicus with the thumb.
- The drugs may be applied to the uterus or they may be inserted in the form of pills based on these ingredients:
  - Naushadar (Ammonium Chloride)
  - Shakar (Cane Sugar)
  - Ushnan (Alkali plant)
  - And any other emmenagogues

Techniques to be adopted if the above mentioned measures have failed

The woman should open the os of the uterus by inserting the probe into it. For this purpose the wooden probe is advisable particularly os Asl-al-khubazi. As a precautionary measure a side of probe must be tied on the thigh with the thread so that it might not enter fully. The probe must be inserted slowly and if it does not serve the purpose at the first attempt it should be repeated after 3 or 4 days. Some women use a wick of thin and soft paper instead of a wooden probe. The wick, soaked in ginger water is put in vagina. A side of the wick is tied with a silken thread for withdrawing it from the vagina. This is useful and harmless
method but has to be administered through an experienced midwife.

**Formulation described in unani literature**

The literature of Unani medicine comprises a good number of contraceptive drugs for oral and local application. Drugs are used orally either in the form of powder or Decoction, while the locally applied drugs have been prescribed in various dosage forms viz. Suppository, pessary, liniment, douche, Fumigation and Sitz bath to be applied on the male and female genital organs. The details of formulations are given below.

**Kitab Al Hawi by Zakaria Razi**

- *Shaham-e-Hanzal* (Citrullus colocynthis), *Saqmoonia* (Convolvulus scammony), *Hazarjashan* (Bryonia alba), *Khabs-al-hadeed* (Iron rust) and *Tukhm Karnab* (Brassica oleracea) in equal quantity should be powdered, mixed with *Qatran* (Pinus sylvestris) and be used as pessary after menstruation.
- *Roghah Balsan* (Balsam oil) when used as pessary and as well as its anointment in cervix before coitus prevents conception.
- *Shokran* (Conium maculatum) when used locally on glans penis act as contraceptive.
- Juice of *Badrooj* (Sweet Basil), if taken orally by woman immediately after coitus prevents conception.
- *Filfil* (Black pepper) acts as spermicidal when it is used as pessary after coitus by a female.
- Razi quoting the authority of Galen, recommends the juice of Na’na (peppermint) used as pessary for contraception.
- Use of *Qatran* (Pinus sylvestris) locally on penis before coitus acts as contraceptive. He holds *Qatran* as the most effective drug as compared to other contraceptives. Continuous use of it by a female causes sterility.
- Razi was of the opinion that the drug *Bukhoor Maryam* (Heliotropium indicum), if tied to the arm or neck of a woman she would not conceive.
- One seed of *Bagla* (Vicia faba) taking daily in early morning for 76 days could cause permanent sterility.\(^{[10]}\)

**Kamil us Sana’ah by Ali Ibn Abbas Majusi**

- *Majoosi* has mentioned about *Milh-e-Indrani* (Rock salt) as contraceptive for both man and woman. He has suggested two ways of its administration. (a) It should be applied on penis before sexual union. (b) It should be used by woman as pessary.
- *Majoosi* recommends the fresh leaves of *Suddab* (Rue) as pessary to prevent conception.
- He recommends the use of *Tukhm Karnab* (Brassica oleracea), *Shagoofa Karnab* and extract of *Suddab* as pessary before or after intercourse.\(^{[11]}\)
Al Qanoon by Ibne Sina

- Shaham-e-Hanzal (Citrrulus colocynthis), Kibreet (Sulphur), Saqmoonia (Convulvulus scammony), Hazarjashan (Bryonia alba), Khabs-al-hadeed (Iron rust) and Tukhm Karnab (Brassica oleracia) in equal quantity should be powdered, mixed with Qatran (Pinus sylvestris) and be used as suppository.

- He mentioned the use of leaves of Gharab (Salix Babylonica) and Fodnaj (Mentha) in the form of pessary for contraceptive purpose.

- Use of Shaham-al-Rumman (Punica granatum) with Shibb (Aluminium hydroxide) by female in the form of pessary before coitus prevents conception.

Zakheera Khawarzam Shahi by Ismail Jurjani

- He mentioned the use of Roghan Kunjad (Seasame oil) as a contraceptive agent for male, when it is applied on glans penis before coitus.

- Local application of Filfil Siyah (Black peeper) and Na’na (peeper mint) by female in the form of pessary after coitus act as contraceptive.

- Shaham-e-Hanzal (Citrrulus colocynthis), Khabs-al-hadeed (Iron rust), Kibreet (Sulphur) Saqmoonia (Convulvulus scammony) and Tukhm Karnab (Brassica oleracia) in equal quantity should be powdered, mixed with Qatran (Pinus sylvestris) and be used as suppository.

Qarabadeen Azam by Hakeem Azam Khan

- Kaali zeeri (Cenratherum anthelminticum), Tukhm Haleela Kabuli (Terminalia chebula), Nagkesar (Mesua ferrea), Narkachoor (Zingiber zerumbet) and Kaifal (Myrica nagi), 5g each, make powder of these and prepare seven tablets from it and should be taken by female during menstruation 1 tablet daily.

- Use of Na’na (Pepper mint) and Suddab (Rue) in the form of pessary before coitus prevents conception.

- Local application of Roghan kunjud (Seasame oil) mixed with onion extract on glans penis prevents conception.

- Use of Aqarqarha (Anacyclus pyrethrum) mixed with honey orally prevents conception.

- Oral or local use of Baqam 1 part, Egg shells ½ parts, Alum 1/4th part mixed in Suddab juice, by female prevents conception.

- Suddab, Na’na and Qatran locally in the form of pessary prevent conception.

- Hurmal (Peganum harmala) 6 g daily after menstruation for seven days prevents conception.

- Use of powder of Dar Filfil (piper longum), Badanj, Kabuli, Tikaar (Borax) with milk after menstruation prevents conception.

Ilajul Ghurba by Hakim Ghulam Imam
Use of Naushadar (Ammonium chloride) and Zaj (Aluminium hydroxide) in the form of pessary prevents conception.

Use of salt mixed with oil on glans penis before coitus acts as spermicidal.

Use of Babchi (Psoralea corylifolia) mixed with oil in the form of suppository after menstruation prevents conception.

Oral use of Haldi (Curcuma longa) powder during menstruation and three days after menstruation prevents conception. [19]

Bayaaz-e-Khas by Hakim Sharif Khan

- Single dose of Abhal (Juniperus communis), Heeng (Ferula foetida), Ushq (Doraema ammoniacum), each 2 g in the form of tablets results in miscarriage.
- Anisoon (Pimpinella anisum), Tukhm Karafs (Apium graveolens), Dudina Dashti, Mushktaramshi (Mentha pulegium) 1 part each and Sumbulutteeb (Naedostachys jatamansi), Darchini (Cinnamomum zeylanicum), Saleekha, Hab Balsam (Commiphora opobalsamum), Ood balsam, abhal (Juniperus communis) and Qust (Saussarea lappa) ½ part, grind them and make tablets, be used by females before coitus. [20]

FEW UNANI DRUGS USED IN BIRTH CONTROL [21]

Botanical Name: Allium ampeloprasum
English Name: Leek
Unani Name: Gandana, Kurras

Parts Used: Seeds, Leaves juice
Action: Emmenagogue, stimulant, contraceptive, foeticidal.
Dosage: Oral 3 g
Chemical Constituents: Essential oil with allicins, a disulphide compound as main ingredient. Fatty acid composition of the seed oil as has oleic acid and proteins.
Usage: For contraception used in form of douche and pessary. For abortion and emmenagogue used as douche and pessary.

Botanical Name: Allium cepa
English Name: Onion
Unani Name: Piyaz, Basal
Parts Used: Roots, Seeds
Action: Emmenagogue, anti inflammatory, disinfectant, antispasmodic, hypoglycaemic, contraceptive.
Dosage: External use as required.
Chemical Constituents: Glucainins, pectin, flavonol.
Usage: In the form of liniment on genitals in males for the purpose of contraception and in the form of vaginal douche in female as emmenagogue.

Botanical Name: Ajuga chamaepitys Schards
English Name: Ground pine, yellow buggle
Unani Name: Kakronda, Kamafitoos
Parts Used: Leaves dry or green, leaves juice.
Action: Emmenagogue, anti inflammatory, laxative, diuretic, abortifacient.
Dosage: Leaves juice 25-100 ml. For external use as required.
Usage: Local in form of vaginal douche and vaginal suppository.

Botanical Name: Aacyclus pyrethrum  
English Name: Spanish pellitory  
Unani Name: Aqarqarha  
Parts Used: Flowers, leaves and roots  
Action: Silagogue, stimulant and sedatives  
Dosage: 1 gm  
Usage: Use locally as paste or suppository in combination with such other agents for contraception.

Botanical Name: Anethum sowa kurz  
English Name: Sowa, Indian dill  
Unani Name: Soya, shibbat  
Parts Used: Seed, oil  
Action: Emmenagogue, carminative, stimulant, stomachic, contraceptive anti pyretic  
Dosage: 10-15 gm.  
Chemical Constituents: D-limonene, dihydrocarvone, a-pinene, a-terpinene, p-cymene, a-bergamotene, b-terpineol, nonaoi, decanal.  
Usage: Use orally as well as locally in the form of pessary.

Botanical Name: Aristolochia rotunda  
English Name: European birthwort, Round Aristolochia.  
Unani Name: Zarawand Mudahraj  
Parts Used: Root  
Action: Resolvent, antidote, stimulant, deobstruent and emmenagogue.  

Botanical Name: Artemisia absinthium  
English Name: Green ginger, Warm wood  
Unani Name: Afsanteen  
Parts Used: Whole Plant  
Action: Anti helminthic, emmenagogue, resolvent, abortifacient  
Usage: Use in the form of vaginal douche as well as pessary.

Botanical Name: Butea monosperma kuntz  
English Name: Flame of the forest, Bengal kino, Bastard teak  
Unani Name: Dhak, Plas, Tesu  
Parts Used: Seeds  
Action: Anti helminthic, contraceptive.  
Dosage: 5-10 gm  
Usage: Use orally as well as locally in the form of pessary with honey for contraception.

Botanical Name: Cinnamomum camphora  
English Name: Camphor tree  
Unani Name: Kafoor  
Parts Used: Extracts  
Action: Stimulant, sedative, anti-spasmodic, contraceptive in males.  
Dosage: 125-250mg  
Usage: Use orally for contraception in males.

Botanical Name: Centaurea centaurium  
English Name: Yellow Knapweed, Great centaury  
Unani Name: Qantooriyoon Kabeer  
Parts Used: Whole plant
**Action:** Emmenagogue, abortifacient, decongestive, astringent.

**Usage:** Local in form of douche and pessary.

**Botanical Name:** Helleborus niger

**English Name:** Black hellebore, Christmas rose.

**Unani Name:** Khirbaq siyah, Khirbaq e aswad.

**Parts Used:** Root

**Action:** Emmenagogue, cathartic, anti helminthic, abortifacient, foeticidal.

**Dosage:** External use as pessary, 2-3 gm.

**Usage:** In the form of vaginal suppository for abortion and for the purpose of emmenagogue too.

**Botanical Name:** Nymphaea alba

**English Name:** White water lily

**Unani Name:** Nilofar

**Parts Used:** Flower, seeds, root

**Action:** Flower cooling effect on blood, contraceptive, anti fertile, cardiotonic

**Dosage:** Green flower 7-10 gm

**Usage:** Used orally with other ingredients inform of compound drugs as contraceptive and antifertility for male and female both.

**Botanical Name:** Peucadanum sativum

**English Name:** Parsnip

**Unani Name:** Jangli gajar, Gajor e Dashti.

**Parts Used:** Seeds

**Action:** Emmenagogue, diuretic, abortifacient.

**Dosage:** 5-7 gm

**Usage:** In form of pessary for abortion.

**CONCLUSION**

For centuries herbal preparation have been connected with the goal of preventing or disrupting pregnancy. Yet there is a need of animal as well as clinical studies to establish the efficacy of above mentioned drugs.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Nil.

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